

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A food preparation line comprising a first section, a second section lying generally normal to the first section, and a third section positioned next to and extending away from the second section, a heated storage compartment positioned on one of the sections, and a cooled storage compartment positioned on another one of the sections.

2. The food preparation line of Claim 1 additionally comprising a pass-through area arranged on the third section.

3. The food preparation line of Claim 1, wherein the heated storage compartment has an access opening on two sides.

4. The food preparation line of Claim 1, wherein the cooled storage compartment has at least one access opening.

5. The food preparation line of Claim 1, further comprising a means for heating a food product at least partially located on the second section.

6. The food preparation line of Claim 1, wherein the first, second and third sections are arranged generally in a U-shape with the first and third sections being positioned generally parallel to each other.

7. The food preparation line of Claim 1 additionally comprising a hot ingredient well positioned near the intersection of the first and second sections, the hot ingredient well being positioned at a working level of the line.

8. The food preparation line of Claim 7 additionally comprising a diagnostic system including at least one sensor interacting with the hot ingredient well to monitor an operational state of the hot ingredient well, and at least one indicator which is located proximate the hot ingredient well, and which cooperates with a diagnostic system to indicate an operational state of the hot ingredient well.

9. The food preparation line of Claim 8, wherein the diagnostic system includes a plurality of sensors which monitor a water level within the hot ingredient well, a set of heating elements within the hot ingredient well, and an automatic fill valve, and the diagnostic system is configured to trigger the indicator when the diagnostic system senses an abnormal condition.

Sub  
B37

10. The food preparation line of Claim 1, wherein the cooled storage compartment comprises an open produce bin positioned on the second section.

11. The food preparation line of Claim 10 additionally comprising a taco rail positioned on the second section and extending along at least a portion of a length of the produce bin.

Sub  
a27

12. The food preparation line of Claim 10 additionally comprising a waste receptacle located beneath the taco rail.

13. The food preparation line of Claim 10, wherein said cooled storage device is a refrigerator located near the produce bin.

Sub  
a37

14. The food preparation line of Claim 1 additionally comprising at least one display unit positioned along the line.

15. The food preparation line of Claim 14, wherein the at least one display is located proximate to either the first or third section.

16. The food preparation line of Claim 1 additionally comprising a package storage compartment located generally near an end of the third section which is distal of the second section.

Sub  
B47

17. The food preparation line of Claim 1, wherein said heated storage compartment comprises a steam cabinet that is arranged on the first section.

18. The food preparation line of Claim 17 further comprising a wrap storage station located below the steam cabinet.

19. The food preparation line of Claim 18 additionally comprising a hot ingredient well positioned near the intersection of the first and second sections, and a cup dispenser arranged between the steam cabinet and the hot ingredient well.

20. The food preparation line of Claim 1, wherein said heated storage compartment comprises a hot cabinet.

21. The food preparation line of Claim 20 additionally comprising a steam cabinet arranged on the first section, generally above the hot cabinet.

Sub  
a47

22. The food preparation line of Claim 1 additionally comprising an ingredient dispenser positioned near the intersection of the first and second sections.

23. The food preparation line of Claim 22, wherein said ingredient dispenser includes a pump mechanism.

24. The food preparation line of Claim 22, wherein said ingredient dispenser includes a metering mechanism to dispense a desired quantity of ingredient.

Sub B67 25. The food preparation line of Claim 22, wherein said ingredient dispenser includes at least one a delivery nozzle located on one side of the dispenser and at least one access opening located on the other side of the dispenser.

26. The food preparation line of Claim 25, wherein said ingredient dispenser includes at least one heated container which stores the ingredient before dispensing, and the access opening is arranged to provide access to the heated container.

27. The food preparation line as in Claim 25, wherein said heated storage compartment comprises a heated shelf configured to store a variety of food ingredients and located near the ingredient dispenser.

28. The food preparation line of Claim 27, wherein the nozzle of the ingredient dispenser is arranged above a hot ingredient well, and the heated shelf is arranged above the ingredient dispenser nozzle.

29. The food preparation line of Claim 1 additionally comprising a plurality of mounting studs projecting from the structure of at least one of the first, second and third sections, and at least one dispenser housing which cooperates with the mounting studs so as to be positioned at a plurality of locations on the line.

30. The food preparation line of Claim 1 additionally comprising a hanging storage system.

Sub 957 31. The food preparation line of Claim 30, wherein the hanging storage system comprises at least one container, a shelf configured to removably receive the at least one container, the shelf further including a hook in at least two locations, the hook defining an aperture, and the aperture removably receiving a rod.

32. A steam cabinet comprising a steam chamber defined by at least enclosing three side walls, a side wall with an opening, a ceiling panel and a floor panel, a steam flow within the steam chamber, a fan located outside of the steam flow, and an air curtain defined by a laminar air flow extending across the opening.

33. The steam cabinet of Claim 32 further comprising a swinging door which extends partially into the opening, the swinging door contacting the air curtain.

34. The steam cabinet of Claim 33 further comprising a heater arranged on the ceiling and an exhaust system positioned above the heater and on the outside of the steam cabinet on the ceiling panel.

35. An ingredient dispenser comprising a hopper connected to a positive displacement pump wherein the positive displacement pump delivers a metered amount of an ingredient.

36. The ingredient dispenser of Claim 34 wherein the positive displacement pump forces the ingredient through a nozzle on a food preparation line.

37. The ingredient dispenser of Claim 34 wherein the positive displacement pump is a piston-type pump which operates with a two-position valve.

38. The ingredient dispenser of Claim 36 wherein the valve includes a chamber with an inlet port that communicates with the hopper, an outlet port that communicates with the nozzle, and a pump port to which the pump is connected.

39. The ingredient dispenser of Claim 37 wherein the valve further includes a gate which selectively connects the pump with the hopper and the nozzle.

40. A hanging storage system comprising a container, a shelf configured to removably receive the container, the shelf further including an aperture and the aperture removably receiving a rod.

41. The hanging storage system of Claim 40 wherein the aperture is defined by a hook.

42. The hanging store system of Claim 40 wherein the container further comprises a hole in a substantially horizontal member so as to allow access into the container from beneath the container.

43. A method of preparing food product along a food line, the method comprising:

performing the following at a first station:

observing a display unit, obtaining a comestible product from a heated storage compartment, obtaining packaging from a storage station located substantially below the heated storage compartment, placing the packaging on a work surface, placing the comestible product on the packaging, dispensing ingredients onto the comestible product from an ingredient dispenser located proximate the heated storage

compartment, handing the comestible product and packaging to a second station, and performing the following at a second station:

obtaining accompaniments from a cooled storage compartment located, applying the accompaniments to the comestible product, and packaging the comestible product in a location within a distance of generally about six feet of the cooled storage compartment so as to be within the arm span of a worker.

44. A food preparation line comprising a first portion and a second portion, the first portion abutting the second portion, the first portion including a warmer and a heating device, the warmer and the heating device positioned within generally about six feet of each other so as to be within an arm span of a worker, the second portion including an accompaniments container proximate the heating device and a packaging dispenser, the accompaniments container and the packaging dispenser positioned within generally about six feet of each other so as to be within an arm span of a worker.

45. The food preparation line of Claim 44 wherein the warmer is a steam cabinet.

46. The food preparation line of Claim 44 wherein the heating device is a hot ingredient well.

47. The food preparation line of Claim 44 wherein the accompaniments container is a produce bin.

48. The food preparation line of Claim 44 wherein the line is formed by three sections in a U-shape, the first section and part of the second section forming the first portion and part of the second section and the third section forming the second portion.

add a67  
add B87